

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
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February 16, 2022

The Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee
Chair
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Jackson Lee:

The Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security must immediately investigate the recent reports that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) released an illegal alien with ties to terrorism from custody because he might catch COVID-19 in a detention facility. According to media reports, U.S. Border Patrol detained Venezuelan citizen Issam Bazzi at the southwest border after he entered the country illegally.¹ The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Terrorist Screening Center flagged Bazzi as someone with "high derogatory information" and ties to an unspecified terror group, and it recommended that Bazzi remain detained.² Although ICE recognized Bazzi as a flight risk, ICE Headquarters ordered Bazzi's release due to concerns that he was overweight and might catch COVID-19 in the detention facility.³ As a result, Bazzi—a foreign national with terrorism ties—has free rein to move throughout the United States. We urge you to immediately schedule a hearing of the Subcommittee to examine the national security threat posed by foreign nationals with terrorism ties entering the United States due to the Biden Administration's lax border security and immigration enforcement.

The facts of this case strongly suggest that the Biden Administration failed to follow appropriate protocols with respect to suspected terrorists. If ICE had followed its normal protocols when a foreign national appears on the FBI's terror watchlist, Bazzi would have been detained for further investigation.⁴ Typically, federal officers would interrogate a foreign national triggering a hit on the watchlist and conduct an in-depth investigation to determine the

¹ Charlie LeDuff, *LeDuff: Is this Venezuelan in Metro Detroit an Asylum seeker or Suspected Terrorist?*, DEADLINE DETROIT (January 27, 2022), https://www.deadlinedetroit.com/articles/29777/leduff_is_this_venezuelan_in_dearborn_an_asylum_seeker_or_suspected_terrorist.

² *Id.*

³ Todd Bensman, *Report: ICE Releases Border-Crossing Terrorist Suspect from Venezuela Despite FBI Recommendation*, CENTER FOR IMMIGRATION STUDIES (January 31, 2022), <https://cis.org/Bensman/Report-ICE-Releases-BorderCrossing-Terrorist-Suspect-Venezuela-Despite-FBI-Recommendation>.

⁴ *Id.*

threat level, the foreign national's purpose in the country, and other possible conspirators.⁵ After federal officers obtained all the information they could from the individual, the foreign national would be deported if he was a suspected terrorist.⁶ There is no known case in which a foreign national who pinged on the terror watchlist was simply released on his own recognizance.⁷

Bazzi's momentary detainment is not an aberration. Other foreign nationals on the terror watch list have been apprehended at the border. Customs and Border Patrol Chief Patrol Agent Chris Clem tweeted on December 20, 2021, that "a potential terrorist" illegally entered the United States from Mexico in the Yuma, AZ Sector.⁸ That tweet was later deleted citing that "it contained sensitive law enforcement information."⁹ Moreover, CBP deleted a press release in April 2021 that detailed the arrest of two Yemeni illegal aliens who pinged the terror watch list.¹⁰ CBP deleted the press release after stating that it "was not properly reviewed and contained certain disclosure and policy information related to national security."¹¹ The actions of officials at DHS seem to be anything but transparent. First, DHS releases a person with known ties to terrorist on his own recognizance, and then DHS hides information about the detainment of illegal aliens on the terror watch list.

Both state and federal law enforcement are overwhelmed by the massive increases of illegal crossings on our southern border over the last year. The crisis occurring as a result of these illegal crossings now extends into the realm of terrorism. Because of the lack of seriousness shown by the Biden Administration in securing our borders, we are allowing foreign nationals into the country with known ties to terror and treating them like any other illegal border crosser. Former Border Patrol Chief Rodney Scott warned in his farewell message that the crisis at the border is not a humanitarian crisis as much as it is one of national security.¹² It is time for the Biden Administration to strengthen our southern border so that federal law enforcement does not feel the need to release suspected terrorists on their own recognizance.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Mark Moore, *Border Patrol Official's Tweet About 'Potential Terrorist' Arrest Deleted*, NEW YORK POST (December 28, 2021), <https://nypost.com/2021/12/28/border-patrol-officials-tweet-about-potential-terrorist-arrest-deleted/>

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Adam Shaw, *CBP Deletes Press Release Outlining Arrest of Yemeni border Crossers on Terror Watch List*, FOX NEWS (April 6, 2021) <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/cbp-press-release-arrest-of-yemeni-border-terror-watch-list>

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Mark Moore, *Ex-Border Patrol Chief Warns of Terrorists Crossing into the US Through Southern Border*, THE NEW YORK POST (Aug. 17, 2021), <https://nypost.com/2021/08/17/terrorists-a-real-threat-to-enter-us-through-southern-border-rodney-scott-says/>.

We ask that you immediately schedule a hearing to allow Subcommittee Members to hear from the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, and terrorism experts about how President Biden's lax border security policies are being exploited by foreign terrorists. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



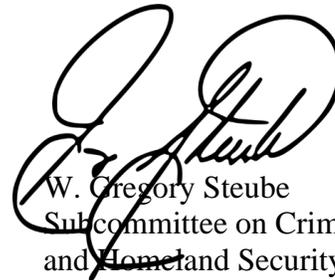
Andy Biggs
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism,
and Homeland Security



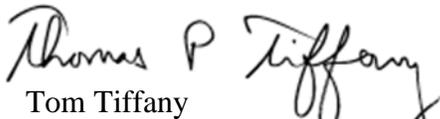
Steve Chabot
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism,
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Louie Gohmert
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